

## THAILAND: WHERE WE CAME IN

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A little noticed column in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch this summer carried the news of an emergency request by the Thailand Government for more helicopters to fight insurgents. The alleged increase in insurgent activity may call for further increase of the already large U.S. commitment of up to 40,000 military men. Sensing in such reports from Thailand a possible parallel to Vietnam of about 1961, the Foreign Policy Roundtable at Washington University in St. Louis had called a conference in May of anthropologists, political scientists and journalists, expert in the area, to discuss present conditions in Thailand and the effects of our involvement on Thai culture and on the course of foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

In 1966, the Foreign Policy Roundtable was instrumental in producing *Politics of Escalation in Vietnam* (Fawcett Premier Books and Beacon Press), an analysis of the relationships between attempts to negotiate a Vietnamese settlement and military escalation by the United States. The proceedings of the present conference will be part of a similar book, designed to acquaint the American people with the complexities of Thailand in the face of growing U.S. involvement there.

The following article summarizing the content of the conference is by Robert Buckhout of the Department of Psychology, Washington University, who is serving as editor of the forthcoming volume. However, the views expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of individual participants or of the Roundtable.

Long clouded by semi-official secrecy, the extent of the build-up of United States involvement in Thailand is now becoming visible:

- Thailand has become a landlocked aircraft carrier for up to 80 per cent of the missions flown by U.S. (and recently Australian) Air Force bombers against targets in North Vietnam and Laos. B-52 bombers now fly out of Thailand on bombing missions.

- U.S. troops numbering 40,000 are stationed in Thailand (2,000 were there in 1961), principally in direct support of the air bases and logistical network

involved in the bombing program. Military aid to Thailand is publicly acknowledged to be \$60 million per year. Supplies, weapons and bases have been positioned in advance to accommodate one 17,000-man U.S. combat division when necessary.

- Military advisers, ex-FBI men, CIA personnel, the Green Berets and an unknown portion of the 40,000 U.S. military troops are involved in training Thai military and police forces to cope with alleged Communist-led insurgent movements in Northeastern and Southern Thailand. This counterinsurgency program was until recently under the command of Maj. Gen. Richard G. Stilwell, who directed similar efforts in Vietnam in 1961.

As in Vietnam, it has been recognized that the 95,000-man Thai army was shaped by years of U.S. military assistance into a cumbersome World War II-like army capable of fighting small conventional battles, but unsuited for anti-guerrilla or pacification operations. Efforts to restyle the Thai military meet resistance from the officer ranks, since the large units and conventional arms are politically useful for gaining privileges, promotions and power.

- U.S. helicopter pilots have flown Thai soldiers into action in the Northeast pending the training of Thai helicopter pilots.

- The United States Information Service (USIS) and other U.S. agencies, are engaged in intensive propaganda efforts through television, radio and mobile information teams in rural areas, to trumpet the virtues of the present Thai Government. This is the political side of the counterinsurgency (COIN) program. The United States Operations Mission (USOM), deploying an annual \$42-million economic aid program, pushes the Accelerated Redevelopment Program (ARD) to raise living standards in the rural areas. It hopes thus to reduce grievances before they can be exploited by the insurgents. ARD has replaced the "resettlement" of tribes in the Northeast, a program that was similar in concept to the "strategic

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